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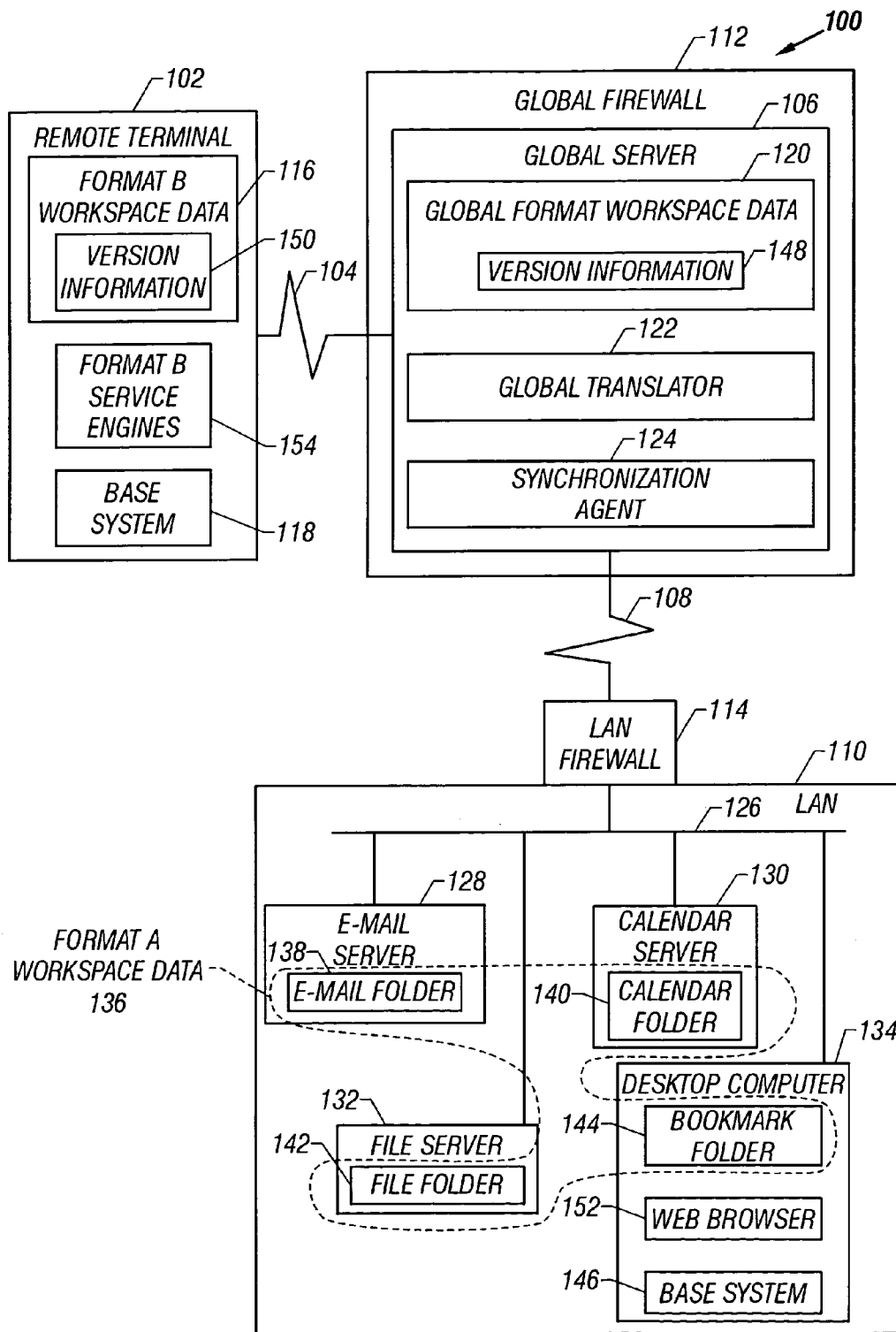


FIG. 1

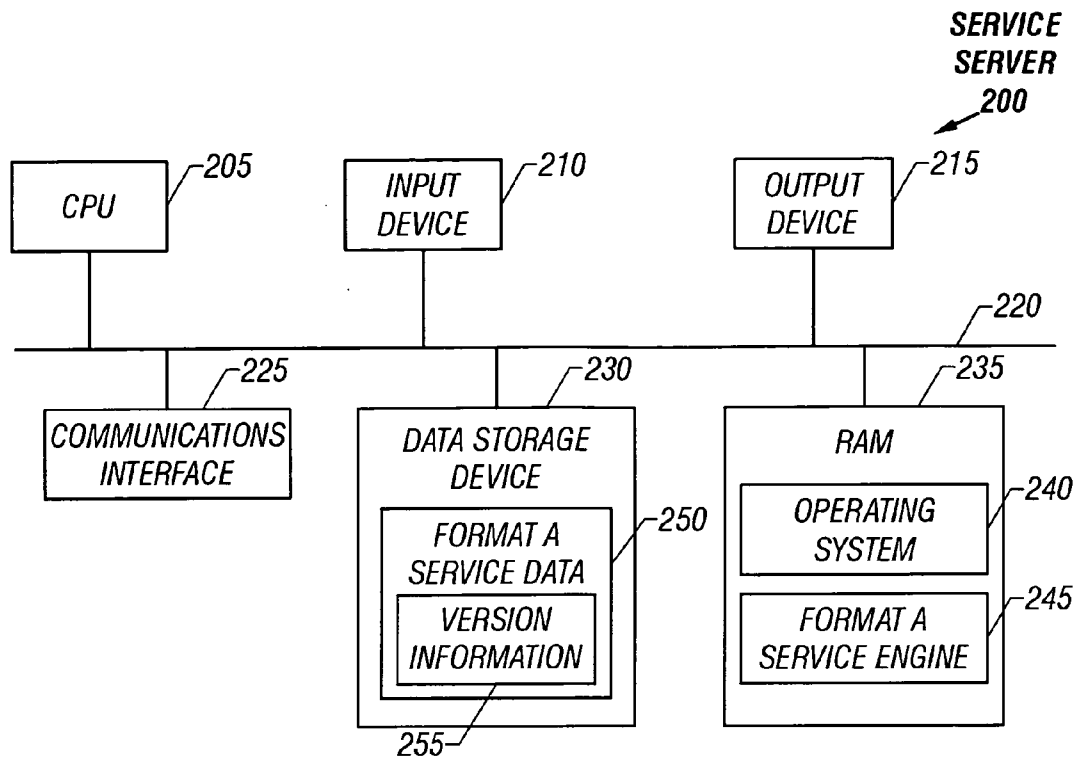


FIG. 2

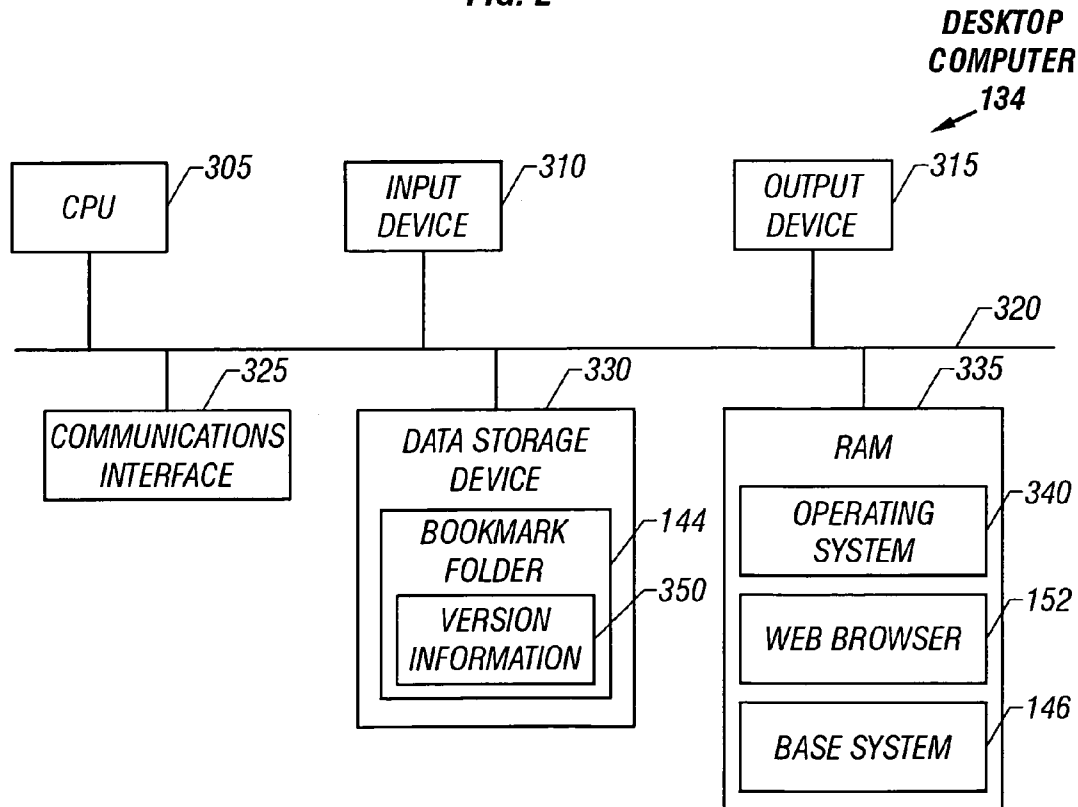


FIG. 3

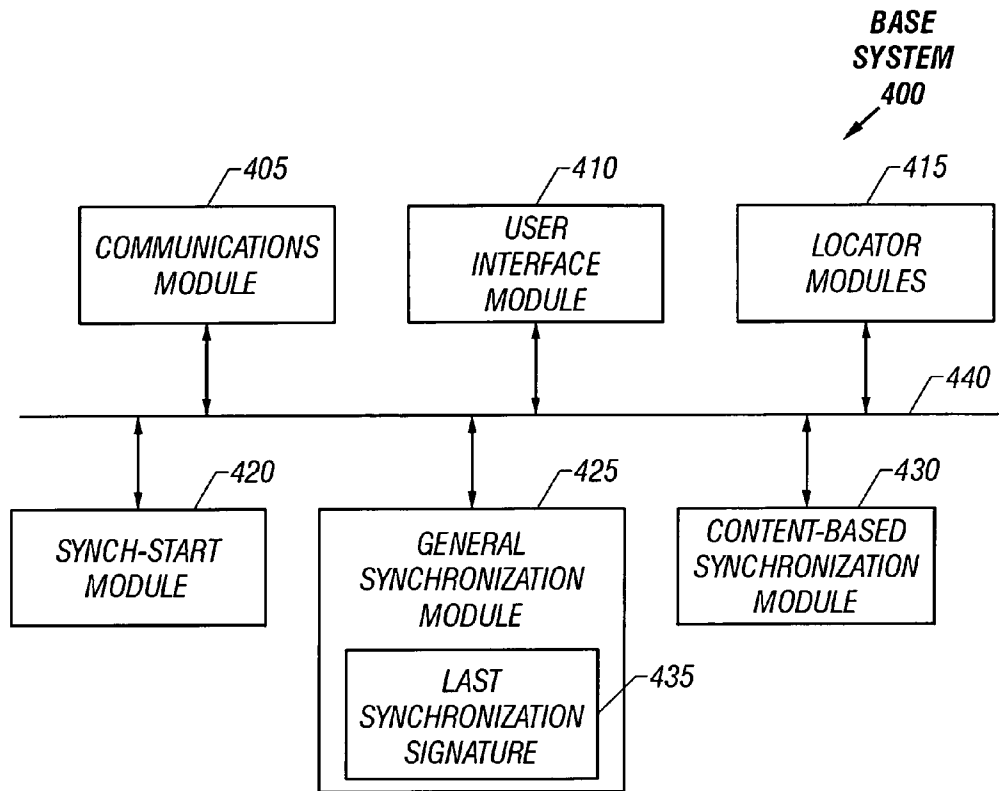


FIG. 4

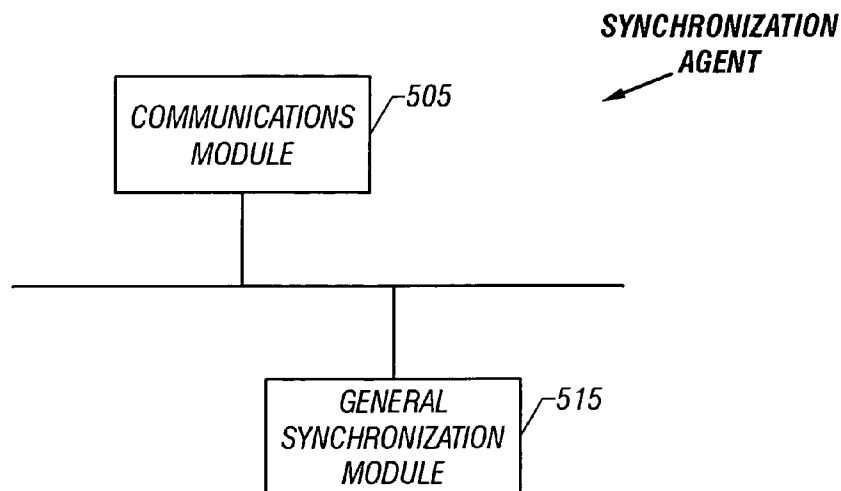


FIG. 5

<i>USER ID</i>	605
<i>ENTRY ID</i>	610
<i>PARENT ID</i>	615
<i>IS FOLDER ?</i>	620
<i>NAME</i>	625
<i>DESCRIPTION</i>	630
<i>URL</i>	635
<i>POSITION</i>	640
<i>IS DELETED</i>	645
<i>LAST MODIFIED DATE</i>	650
<i>CREATED DATE</i>	655
<i>SEPARATION AFTER ?</i>	660

FIG. 6

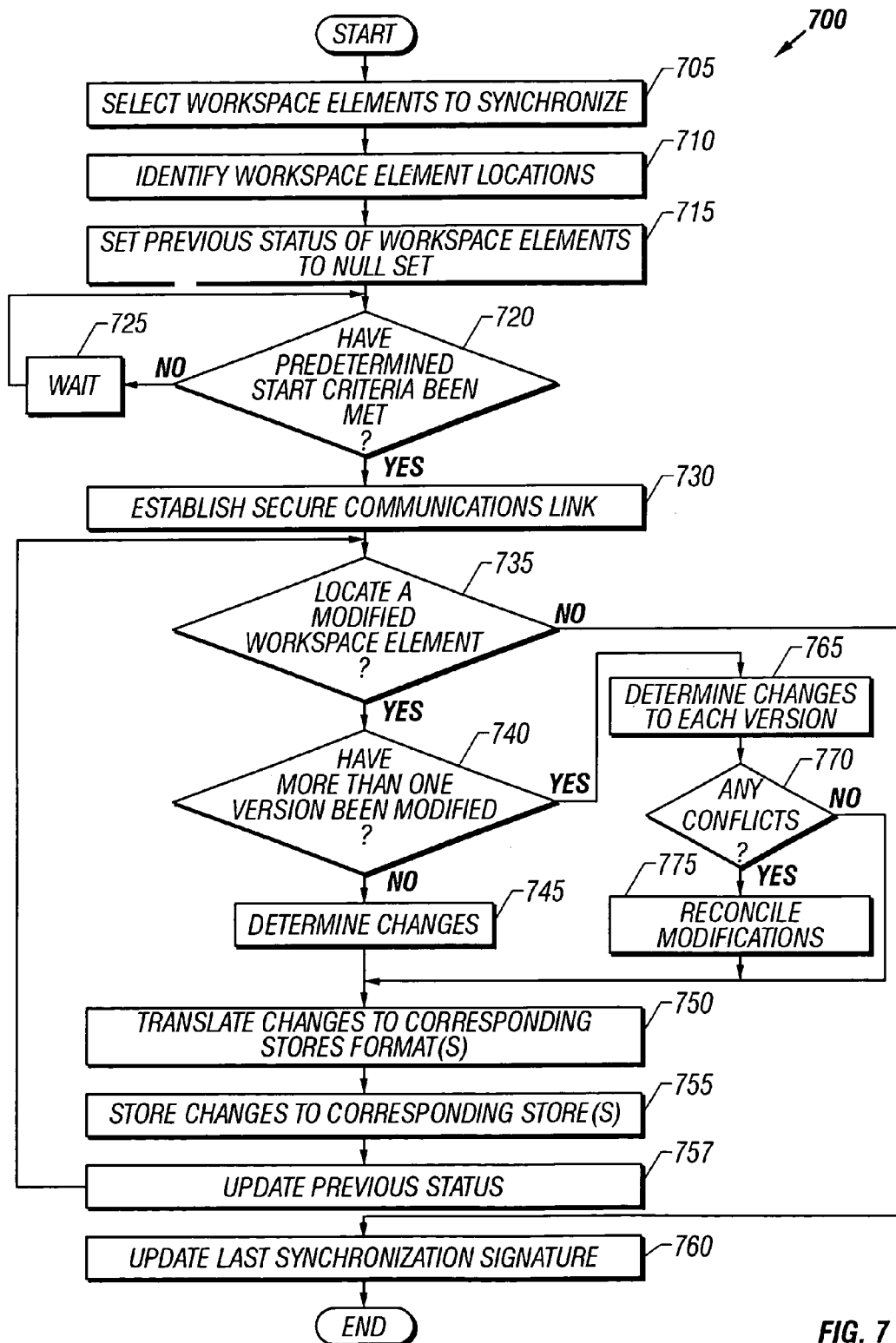


FIG. 7

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SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR TRANSMITTING WORKSPACE ELEMENTS ACROSS A NETWORK

CROSS-REFERENCE TO PRIORITY APPLICATION

This application is a continuation claims priority to the patent application entitled "System and Method for Globally and Securely Accessing Unified Information in a Computer Network," Ser. No. 09/666,877, filed on Sep. 20, 2000, now U.S. Pat. No. 6,708,221 by inventors Daniel J. Mendez, Mark D. Riggins, Prasad Wagle, Hong Q. Bui, Mason Ng, Sean Micheal Quinlan, Christine C. Ying, Christopher R. Zuleeg, David J. Cowan, Joanna A. Aptekar-Strober and R. Stanley Bailes, and hereby incorporates by reference U.S. Pat. No. 6,085,192, issued on Jul. 4, 2000, entitled "System and Method for Securely Synchronizing Multiple Copies of a Workspace Element in a Network," application Ser. No. 08/835,997, filed on Apr. 11, 1997, by inventors Daniel J. Mendez, Mark D. Riggins, Prasad Wagle and Christine C. Ying.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention

This invention relates generally to computer networks, and more particularly to a system and method for using a global translator to synchronize workspace elements such as files across a computer network.

2. Description of the Background Art

Data consistency is a significant concern for computer users. For example, when maintaining multiple independently-modifiable copies of a document, a user risks using an outdated version. By the time the user notices an inconsistency, interparty miscommunication or data loss may have already resulted. The user must then spend more time attempting to reconcile the inconsistent versions and addressing any miscommunications.

The problem of data inconsistency is exacerbated when multiple copies of a document are maintained at different network locations. For example, due to network security systems such as conventional firewall technology, a user may have access only to a particular one of these network locations. Without access to the other sites, the user cannot confirm that the version on the accessible site is the most recent draft.

Data consistency problems may also arise when using application programs from different vendors. For example, the Netscape Navigator™ web browser and the Internet Explorer™ web browser each store bookmarks for quick reference to interesting web sites. However, since each web browser uses different formats and stores bookmarks in different files, the bookmarks are not interchangeable. In addition, one web browser may store a needed bookmark, and the other may not. A user who, for example, runs the Internet Explorer™ web browser at home and runs the Netscape Navigator™ web browser at work risks having inconsistent bookmarks at each location.

Therefore, a system and method are needed for providing users with data consistency, and more particularly for synchronizing multiple copies of a workspace element such as a document across a computer network.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention provides a system and method for using a global translator to synchronize multiple copies of a workspace element in a secure network environment. The secure network environment includes a global server con-

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nected to multiple clients. Using the present system and method, the clients automatically synchronize workspace elements between multiple sites, independent of whether the sites are protected by site firewalls. Using the present system and method, the clients can automatically synchronize workspace elements across different formats and can merge workspace element folders for cross use.

The system includes a first store for storing first workspace elements in a first format, a second store for storing second workspace elements in a second format, a communications channel coupling the first store to the second store, synchronization means for synchronizing first workspace elements and second workspace elements, and a translator for translating between the first format and the second format.

Similarly, the method includes the steps of accessing a first store storing a first workspace element in a first format, accessing a second store storing a second workspace element in a second format, synchronizing the first workspace element and the second workspace element, and translating between the first format and the second format.

The system and method advantageously use a trusted third party to enable the synchronization of workspace data among multiple sites. Accordingly, a client user who maintains a work site, a home site, an off-site and the global server site can synchronize the workspace data or portions thereof among all four sites. Further, the predetermined criteria (which control when the synchronization-start module initiates synchronization) may be set so that the general synchronization module synchronizes the workspace data upon user request, at predetermined times during the day such as while the user is commuting, or after a predetermined user action such as user log-off or user log-on. Because the system and method operate over the Internet, synchronization can occur over any distance. Since the system and method include format translation, merging of workspace elements between different application programs and different platforms is possible. Further, because synchronization is initiated from within the firewall, the typical firewall which prevents in-bound communications does not act as an impediment to workspace element synchronization. Also, since the user's preferences may be previously set, the present system and method may operate unattended by the client user.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is a block diagram illustrating a computer network in accordance with the present invention;

FIG. 2 is a block diagram illustrating details of a FIG. 1 service server;

FIG. 3 is a block diagram illustrating details of the FIG. 1 desktop computer;

FIG. 4 is a block diagram illustrating details of a FIG. 1 base system;

FIG. 5 is a block diagram illustrating details of the FIG. 1 synchronization agent;

FIG. 6 is a graphical representation of an example bookmark in the global format; and

FIG. 7 is a flowchart illustrating a method for synchronizing multiple copies of a workspace element in a secure network.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

FIG. 1 is a block diagram illustrating a computer network 100, comprising a first node such as a remote computer terminal 102 coupled via a communications channel 104

such as the Internet to a global server **106**. The global server **106** is in turn coupled via a communications channel **108** such as the Internet to a second node such as a Local Area Network (LAN) **110**. The global server **106** is protected by a global firewall **112**, and the LAN **110** is protected by a LAN firewall **114**.

The LAN **110** includes a system bus **126** coupling the LAN firewall **114** to an e-mail server **128** having an e-mail folder **138** containing e-mails, to a file server **132** having a file folder **142** containing files, to a calendar server **130** having a calendar folder **140** containing calendar data, and to a desktop computer **134** having a web browser **152** and a bookmark folder **144** containing bookmarks. It will be appreciated that the e-mail folder **138**, file folder **142**, calendar folder **140** and bookmark folder **144** or portions thereof may be stored at different locations such as on the desktop computer **134**. The e-mail folder **138**, file folder **142**, calendar folder **140** and bookmark folder **144** are exemplary, grouped by like information and are collectively referred to herein as "workspace data" **136**. Those skilled in the art will recognize that the workspace data **136** may include other types of data such as an application program such as Microsoft Word 6.0.1 and the documents created using them. It will be further appreciated that the e-mail folder **138**, file folder **142**, calendar folder **140** and bookmark folder **144** may each be divided into workspace elements, wherein each workspace element folder or each workspace element individually is identified by particular version information **255** (described below with reference to FIG. 2). Accordingly, each e-mail or e-mail folder, file or file folder, calendar or calendar folder, bookmark or bookmark folder, document or document folder, etc. may be referred to as "a workspace element."

Each workspace element of workspace data **136** in LAN **110** is maintained in a predetermined format, referred to as Format A, which is based on the service engine **245** (FIG. 2) that created it. For example, the web browser **152** on the desktop computer **134** may be the Netscape Navigator™ web browser, and the bookmarks in the bookmark folder **144** created thereby are maintained in Format A. Although Format A is being described as a single format, one skilled in the art knows that Format A actually includes a format for each information type, e.g., there will be a Format A for bookmarks, a Format A for files, a Format A for calendar data, a Format A for e-mails, etc.

The remote terminal **102** stores service engines **154** for maintaining workspace data **116**, which may include information common with information in the workspace data **136**. The workspace data **116** is maintained in a format, referred to as Format B, which may be different from Format A. Format B is also based on the service engines **154** that create the workspace elements. For example, if one of the service engines **154** is the Internet Explorer™ web browser (not shown), then the bookmarks (not shown) created therewith are maintained in Format B. Although Format B is being described as a single format, one skilled in the art knows that Format B actually includes a format for each information type. Further, the workspace data **116** also includes version information **150** similar to version information **255** described below with reference to FIG. 2.

It will be appreciated that remote terminal **102** may include a smart telephone, a Personal Data Assistant (PDA) such as the PalmPilot system by the U.S. Robotics, Inc., a laptop computer, etc. As a smart telephone, the workspace data **116** may include telephone numbers and e-mails. As a PDA, the workspace data **116** may include addresses, cal-

endar data and e-mails. As a laptop computer, the workspace data **116** may include the same types of information as workspace data **136**.

The global server **106** acts as a third party administrator. The global server **106** stores independently-modifiable copies of selected portions of the workspace data **136** and **116**, collectively referred to herein as workspace data **120**. Accordingly, the workspace data **120** includes an independently-modifiable copy of each workspace element in the selected portions of the workspace data **136** and **116** and an independently-modifiable copy of each corresponding version information **255** (FIG. 2) and **150**. The version information copies are collectively referred to herein as version information **148**, and are also described with reference to FIG. 2.

The global server **106** maintains the workspace data **120** in a format, referred to as a "global format," which is selected to be easily translatable by the global translator **122** to and from Format A and to and from Format B. Although the global format is being described as a single format, one skilled in the art knows that the global format actually includes a global format for each information type, e.g., there will be a global format for bookmarks, a global format for files, a global format for calendar data, a global format for e-mails, etc. An example bookmark workspace element in the global format is described in detail below with reference to FIG. 6.

Network **100** further comprises synchronization means, which includes a base system **146** stored within the LAN **110** and for example on the desktop computer **134**. Network **100** further includes a synchronization agent **124** stored outside the LAN firewall **114** and preferably on the global server **106**. The base system **146** and the synchronization agent **124** cooperate to synchronize selected portions of the workspace data **136** with selected portions of the workspace data **120**. The synchronization means may synchronize workspace elements individually, e.g., specific word processor documents, or may synchronize workspace element folders, e.g., a bookmark folder. Generally, the base system **146** manages the selected portion of the workspace data **136** within the LAN **110** and the synchronization agent **124** manages the selected portions of the workspace data **120** within the global server **106**. It will be appreciated that the global translator **122** cooperates with the synchronization means to translate data formats to and from the global format. As described in greater detail below with reference to FIG. 4, the base system **190** preferably initiates and controls data synchronization. Other components and functions of the global server **106** are described in the cross-referenced patent application which is herein incorporated by reference.

The synchronization means may also include, stored on the remote terminal **102**, a base system **118** which operates in a similar manner to the base system **146**. The base system **118** on the remote terminal **102** cooperates with the synchronization agent **124** to synchronize selected portions of the workspace data **116** with selected portions of the workspace data **120**. As described in greater detail below with reference to FIG. 4, the base system **118** on the remote terminal **102** also preferably initiates and controls data synchronization with the global server **106**. Also, note that the distribution of labor between the base system **118** in the remote terminal **102** and the synchronization agent **124** in the global server **106** may vary. Sometimes, primarily when the remote terminal **102** is a relatively less computationally powerful device (such as a smart phone or a PDA), most of the actual computationally-intensive work will occur within the synchronization agent **124** in the global server **106**. In

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other situations, for example, when the remote terminal 102 is a fully configured PC, most of the computationally-intensive work will occur locally on the base system 118 in the remote terminal 102.

Accordingly, the synchronization means independently synchronizes the selected portions of workspace data 116 and 136 with the selected portions of the workspace data 120. Thus, the synchronization means indirectly synchronizes workspace data 136 with workspace data 116.

FIG. 2 is a block diagram illustrating details of a service server 200, wherein each of the e-mail server 145, the file server 150, the calendar server 155 and the desktop computer 160 is an instance thereof. Service server 200 includes a Central Processing Unit (CPU) 205 such as an Intel Pentium® microprocessor or a Motorola Power PC® microprocessor. An input device 210 such as a keyboard and mouse and an output device 215 such as a Cathode Ray Tube (CRT) display are coupled via a signal bus 220 to CPU 205. A communications interface 225 (such as an Ethernet port), a data storage device 230 (such as a magnetic disk), and Random-Access Memory (RAM) 235 are further coupled via signal bus 220 to the CPU 205.

An operating system 240 includes a program for controlling processing by the CPU 205, and is typically stored in the data storage device 230 and loaded into the RAM 235 for execution. A service engine 245 includes a program for performing a particular service such as maintaining an e-mail data base, a file data base, a calendar data base or a bookmarks data base. The service engine 245 may also be stored in the data storage device 230 and loaded into the RAM 235 for execution.

To perform a service, the service engine 245 creates service data 250 (e.g., an e-mail or an e-mail folder 138 containing e-mails, a file or a file folder 142 containing files, calendar data or a calendar folder 140 containing calendar data, a bookmark or a bookmark folder 144 containing bookmarks, etc.) in Format A according to predetermined protocols. The service engine 245 stores the data 250 in the data storage device 250. The service data 250 includes version information 255 indicating the date and time of the last modification and the status as of the last interaction with the global server 106.

For example, if service data 250 is created and selected to be merged with global server workspace data 120, then the version information 255 for the service data 250 may include the date of last modification and a null set indicating the status as of the last interaction with the global server 106. From the version information 255, the base system 146 determines that the service data 250 in its entirety has not been merged with the global server workspace data 120. Similarly, if the service data 255 included elements 1, 2 and 3 as of the last modification, then the previous status as of the last interaction will indicate that the service data 255 included elements 1, 2 and 3. If the service data 255 currently includes elements 2, 3 and 4, then the base system 140 will determine, that, since last synchronization, element 1 has been deleted and element 4 has been added.

It will be appreciated that the version information 148 on the global server 106 includes information similar to version information 255. That is, the version information 148 will include information indicating the date and time the version was last modified and the status as of the last interaction with each client. The service engine 245 operates to update the version information 255 after modifications are made and after synchronization occurs.

FIG. 3 is a block diagram illustrating details of the desktop computer 160, which includes a CPU 305, an input

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device 310, an output device 315, a communications interface 325, a data storage device 330 and RAM 335, each coupled to a signal bus 320.

An operating system 340 includes a program for controlling processing by the CPU 305, and is typically stored in the data storage device 330 and loaded into the RAM 335 for execution. A web browser 152 (i.e., a particular service engine 245, FIG. 2) includes a Format A service program for managing bookmark folder 144 (i.e., particular service data 250, FIG. 2) which includes version information 350 (i.e., particular version information 255, FIG. 2). The web browser 152 may be also stored in the data storage device 330 and loaded into the RAM 335 for execution. The bookmark folder 144 may be stored in the data storage device 330. As stated above with reference to FIG. 1, the base system 146 operates to synchronize the workspace data 136 (which includes the bookmark folder 144) with the workspace data 120. The base system 146 may be also stored in the data storage device 330 and loaded into the RAM 335 for execution.

FIG. 4 is a block diagram illustrating details of the base system 400, which exemplifies base systems 146 and 118. Base system 400 includes a communications module 405, a user interface module 410, locator modules 415, a synchronization-start ("synch-start") module 420, a general synchronization module 425 and a content-based synchronization module 430. For simplicity, each module is illustrated as communicating with one another via a signal bus 440.

The communications module 405 includes routines for compressing data and routines for communicating via the communications interface 325 (FIG. 3) with the synchronization agent 124 (FIG. 1). The communications module 405 may further include routines for applying Secure Socket Layer (SSL) technology and user identification and authentication techniques (i.e., digital certificates) to establish a secure communication channel through the global firewall 112. Examples of communications modules 405 may include TCP/IP stacks or the AppleTalk® protocol.

The user interface module 410 includes routines for communicating with a user, and may include a conventional Graphical User Interface (GUI). The user interface module 410 cooperates with the other system components as described herein.

The locator modules 415 include routines for identifying the memory locations of the workspace elements in the workspace data 136 or 116 and in the workspace data 120. Workspace element memory location identification may be implemented using intelligent software, i.e., preset memory addresses or the system's registry, or using dialogue boxes to query a user. More particularly, the locator modules 415 in the base system 146 determine the memory addresses of the e-mail folder 138, the file folder 142, the calendar folder 140 and the bookmark folder 144 and the memory addresses of the workspace elements therein. The locator modules 415 also determine the corresponding memory addresses of the corresponding folders in the workspace data 120 and the corresponding workspace elements therein. Similarly, the locator modules 415 in the base system 118 determine the memory locations of the workspace elements of workspace data 116 and the memory locations of the corresponding workspace elements in the workspace data 120.

It will be appreciated that the locator modules 415 may include locator modules 415 specifically dedicated to each folder or workspace data type. That is, the locator modules 415 may include a locator module 415 dedicated to locating bookmarks, a locator module 415 dedicated to locating e-mails, a locator module 415 dedicated to locating files, a

locator module **415** dedicated to locating calendar appointments, etc. It will be further appreciated that the locator modules **415** may perform workspace element memory location identification upon system boot-up or after each communication with the global server **120** to maintain updated memory addresses of workspace elements.

The synchronization-start module **420** includes routines for determining when to initiate synchronization of workspace data **136** or **116** with workspace data **120**. For example, the synchronization-start module **420** may initiate data synchronization upon user request, at a particular time of day, after a predetermined time period passes, after a predetermined number of changes, after a user action such as user log-off or upon like criteria. The synchronization-start module **420** initiates data synchronization by instructing the general synchronization module **425** (described below) to begin execution of its routines. It will be appreciated that communication with the synchronization agent **124** preferably initiates from within the LAN **110**, because the typical firewall **114** prevents in-bound communications and allows out-bound communications.

The general synchronization module **425** includes routines for receiving version information **148** for modified versions from the synchronization agent **124** (FIG. 1), and routines for examining the version information **255** or **150** against a last synchronization signature **435** (such as a last synchronization date and time) to determine which versions have been modified. The general synchronization module **425** further includes routines for examining the version information **148** and the version information **255** or **150** to determine if one or both versions of a particular workspace element or workspace element folder have been modified.

Further, the general synchronization module **425** includes routines for performing an appropriate synchronizing responsive action. Appropriate synchronizing responsive actions may include, if only one version of a workspace element in workspace data **136** or **116** has been modified, then forwarding the modified version (as the preferred version) to the other store(s) or determining and forwarding only the changes made. Computing the changes made may be performed by examining the current status against the previous status as of the last synchronization or by comparing the two versions. It will be appreciated that no content-based review of the changes is needed. It will be appreciated that one store preferably forwards only the changes to the other store for optimizing use of processor power and minimizing the data communications across the communications channel **108** or **104**.

Other appropriate synchronizing responsive actions may include, if two versions of a workspace element have been modified independently, then instructing the content-based synchronization module **430** (described below) to execute its routines. That is, if two versions of the same workspace element have been modified independently, then a content-based review of the changes is preferable. Upon completion of the data synchronization, the general synchronization module **425** updates the last synchronization signature **435**.

The content-based synchronization module **430** includes routines for reconciling two or more modified versions of a workspace element. For example, if a user has independently modified the original and the copy of a workspace element since the last synchronization, then the content-based synchronization module **430** determines an appropriate responsive action. The content-based synchronization module **430** may request the user to select a preferred one of the modified versions or may respond based on preset preferences, i.e., by storing both versions in both stores or

preferably by integrating the modified versions into a single preferred version which replaces each modified version at both stores.

The content-based synchronization module **430** examines the changes made to each version and determines if conflicts exist. When implementing version integration, a conflict may arise if inconsistent modifications such as deleting a paragraph in one version and modifying the same paragraph in the other version have been made. If a conflict exists, then the content-based synchronization module **430** attempts to reconcile the conflict, e.g., by requesting user selection or by storing both versions at both stores. Otherwise, if no conflict exists, then the content-based synchronization module **430** integrates the changes to each of the versions and updates the version information **148**, **150** or **255** accordingly.

FIG. 5 is a block diagram illustrating details of the synchronization agent **124**, which includes a communications module **505** (similar to the communications module **405** described above with reference to FIG. 4) and a general synchronization module **515** (similar to the general synchronization module **425** described above also with reference to FIG. 4).

The communications module **505** includes routines for compressing data, and routines for communicating via the communications channel **108** with the base system **146** or via the communications channel **104** with the base system **118**. The communications module **505** may further include routines for establishing a secure communications channel through the global firewall **112** and through the LAN firewall **114** with the communications module **405**.

Similar to the general synchronization module **425**, the general synchronization module **515** includes routines for examining the version information **148** and the last synchronization signature **435** (FIG. 4) to determine which versions have been modified and the changes made. It will be appreciated that the general synchronization module **515** may maintain its own last synchronization signature **435** copy (not shown) or may request the last synchronization signature **435** from the base system **146** or **118**. The general synchronization module **515** further includes routines for forwarding workspace data **120** determined to be modified to the general synchronization module **425**, and routines for receiving preferred versions of workspace elements of workspace data **136** or **116** or just the changes from the general synchronization module **425**.

FIG. 6 illustrates an example bookmark workspace element in the global format. The global translator **122** incorporates all the information needed by both formats (Format A and Format B) to create the Global Format. For example, if a bookmark in Format A needs elements X, Y and Z and a bookmark in Format B needs elements W, X and Y, the global translator **122** incorporates elements W, X, Y and Z to create a bookmark in the Global Format. Further, the global translator **122** incorporates the information which is needed by the synchronization means such as the last modified date. Accordingly, a bookmark in the Global Format includes a user identification (ID) **605**, an entry ID **610**, a parent ID **615**, a folder ID flag **620**, a name **625**, a description **630**, the Uniform Resource Locator (URL) **635**, the position **640**, a deleted ID flag **645**, a last modified date **650**, a created date **655** and a separation ID flag **660**.

FIG. 7 is a flowchart illustrating a method **700** for using a global translator **122** to synchronize multiple copies of a workspace element in a secure network **100**. Method **700** begins with the user interface module **410** in step **705** enabling a user to select workspace elements of workspace data **136** and **118** for the synchronization means to synchro-

nize. The locator modules **415** in step **710** identify the memory locations of the workspace elements in workspace data **136** and **116** and the corresponding memory locations in workspace data **120**. If a selected workspace element does not have a corresponding memory location, such as in the case of adding a new workspace elements to the global server **106**, then one is selected. The selected memory location may be a preexisting workspace element or a new workspace element. As stated above, workspace element memory location identification may be implemented using intelligent software or dialogue boxes. The general synchronization module **425** and general synchronization module **515** in step **715** set the previous status of the workspace elements equal to the null set. Setting the previous status to the null set indicates that all information of the workspace element has been added.

The synchronization-start module **420** in step **720** determines whether predetermined criteria have been met which indicate that synchronization of the workspace elements selected in step **705** should start. If not, then the synchronization-start module **420** in step **725** waits and loops back to step **720**. Otherwise, the communications module **405** and communications module **505** in step **730** establish a secure communications channel therebetween.

The general synchronization module **425** and the general synchronization module **515** in step **735** determine whether any workspace elements have been modified. That is, the general synchronization module **425** in step **740** examines the version information **255** or **150** of each selected workspace element in the workspace data **136** or **116** against the last synchronization signature **435** to locate modified workspace elements. This comparison may include comparing the date of last modification with the date of last synchronization, or may include a comparison between the current status and the previous status as of the last interaction. Similarly, the general synchronization module **515** examines the version information **148** of each corresponding workspace element in workspace data **120** and the last synchronization signature **435** to locate modified workspace elements.

If in step **735** no modified workspace elements or folders are located, then the general synchronization modules **425** and **515** in step **760** update the last synchronization signature **435** and method **700** ends. Otherwise, the general synchronization module **425** in step **740** determines whether more than one version of a workspace element has been modified since the last synchronization.

If only one version has been modified, then the corresponding general synchronization module **425** or **515** in step **745** determines the changes made. As stated above, determining the changes made may be implemented by comparing the current status of the workspace element against the previous status of the workspace element as of the last interaction therebetween. If the changes were made only to the version in the workspace data **120**, then the global translator **122** in step **750** translates the changes to the format used by the other store, and the general synchronization module **515** in step **755** forwards the translated changes to the general synchronization module **425** for updating the outdated workspace element in the workspace data **136** or **116**. If the updated version is a workspace element in the workspace data **136** or **116**, then the general synchronization module **425** sends the changes to the updated version to the global translator **122** for translation and then to the general synchronization module **515** for updating the outdated workspace element in the workspace data **120**. The general synchronization module **425** and the

general synchronization module **515** in step **757** update the previous state of to reflect the current state as of this interaction. Method **700** then returns to step **735**.

If the general synchronization module **425** in step **740** determines that multiple versions have been modified, then the general synchronization module **425** in step **765** computes the changes to each version and in step **770** instructs the content-based synchronization module **430** to examine content to determine if any conflicts exist. For example, the content-based synchronization module **430** may determine that a conflict exists if a user deletes a paragraph in one version and modifies the same paragraph in another version. The content-based synchronization module **430** may determine that a conflict does not exist if a user deletes different paragraphs in each version. If no conflict is found, then method **700** jumps to step **750** for translating and forwarding the changes in each version to the other store. However, if a conflict is found, then the content-based synchronization module **430** in step **775** reconciles the modified versions. As stated above, reconciliation may include requesting instructions from the user or based on preselected preferences performing responsive actions such as storing both versions at both stores. Method **700** then proceeds to step **750**.

It will be appreciated that in step **710** new workspace elements and preexisting workspace elements to which new workspace elements will be merged are set to "modified" and the previous status is set to the null set. Thus, the general synchronization module **425** in step **740** will determine that more than one version has been modified and the content-based synchronization module **430** in step **770** will determine that no conflict exists. The changes in each will be translated and forwarded to the other store. Accordingly, the two versions will be effectively merged and stored at each store.

For example, if a first bookmark folder was created by the web browser **152** on the desktop computer **134**, a second folder was created by a web browser (not shown) on the remote terminal **102**, no preexisting folder existed on the global server **106** and the user selected each of these folders for synchronization, then the synchronization means will effectively merge the first and second folders. That is, the general synchronization module **425** on the desktop computer **134** will determine that the first folder has been modified and the previous status is equal to the null set. The general synchronization module **425** will determine and send the changes, i.e., all the workspace elements in the first folder, to a new global folder on the global server **106**. Similarly, the general synchronization module **425** on the remote terminal **102** will determine that, as of its last interaction, the previous status of each of the second and the global folders is the null set. The general synchronization module **425** will instruct the content-based synchronization module **430** to examine the changes made to each folder to determine whether a conflict exists. Since no conflicts will exist, the general synchronization module **425** will forward the changes to the global folder and the general synchronization module **515** will forward its changes to the second store, thereby merging the workspace elements of the first and second folders in the global and second folders. The general synchronization module **515** will inform the general synchronization module **425** that the global folder has been modified relative to the last interaction, and will forward the new changes to the first folder. Thus, the first and second folders will be merged and stored at each store.

For a second example, the user may select an exemplary document in the LAN **110** to be synchronized. The general synchronization module **425** will forward the document to

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the global server 106. Similarly, the user may select the same document for synchronization on the remote terminal 102. The general synchronization module 515 will forward the document to the remote terminal 102. If changes were made to the documents independently, then the content-based synchronization module 430 will examine the content of the documents to determine if a conflict exists. If no conflict exists, then as described above, the general synchronization modules 425 and 515 will merge the documents. Otherwise, if a conflict does exist, the content-based synchronization module 430 will reconcile the changes and then the general synchronization modules 425 and 515 will forward the reconciled changes to each other.

The foregoing description of the preferred embodiments of the invention is by way of example only, and other variations of the above-described embodiments and methods are provided by the present invention. For example, although the global server 106 is illustrated as a single device, the global server 106 may include several computers networked together. Components of this invention may be implemented using a programmed general purpose digital computer, using application specific integrated circuits, or using a network of interconnected conventional components and circuits. The embodiments described herein have been presented for purposes of illustration and are not intended to be exhaustive or limiting. Many variations and modifications are possible in light of the foregoing teaching. The system is limited only by the following claims.

What is claimed is:

1. A method, comprising:

providing a first memory store including a first folder for storing first record entries in a file;
 providing a second memory store coupled to the first memory store, the second memory store including a second folder for storing second record entries in a file, the second folder being synchronized with the first folder at a first moment in time such that a content of the second folder is consistent with the content of the first folder at the first moment in time;
 providing a global server including a third memory store having a third folder for storing third record entries in a file;
 receiving new first record entries in a file at the first memory store at a second moment in time later than the first moment in time;
 electronically synchronizing the first folder and the third folder, such that a new third record entry is created in the third folder based on the new first record entries; and
 electronically synchronizing the third folder and the second folder, such that a new second record entry is created in the second folder based on the new third record entry.

2. A system, comprising:

a first memory store including a first folder for storing first record entries in a file;
 a second memory store coupled to the first memory store the second memory store including a second folder for storing second record entries in a file, the second folder being synchronized with the first folder at a first moment in time such that a content of the second folder is consistent with the content of the first folder at the first moment in time;
 an interface for receiving new record entries in a file at the first memory store;
 a general synchronization module for electronically synchronizing the first folder and a third folder such that a

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anew third record entry is created in the third folder based on the new first record entries; and

a synchronization agent for electronically synchronizing the third folder and the second folder such that a new second record entry is created in the second folder based on the new third record entry.

3. A system, comprising:

first memory means including a first folder for storing first record entries in a file;

second memory means coupled to the first memory means, the second memory means including a second folder for storing second file entries in a file, the second folder being synchronized with the first folder at a first moment in time such that a content of the second folder is consistent with the content of the first folder at the first moment in time;

providing a global server including a third memory means having a third folder for storing third record entries in a file;

means for receiving new record file entries at the first memory means;

means for electronically synchronizing the first folder and the third folder such that a new third record entry is created in the third folder based on the new first record entries; and

means for electronically synchronizing the third folder and the second folder, such that a new second record entry is created in the second folder based on the new third record entry.

4. A method, comprising:

providing a first memory store including a first folder for storing first record entries in a file;

providing a second memory store coupled to the first memory store, the second memory store including a second folder for storing second record entries in a file the second folder being synchronized with the first folder at a first moment in time such that a content of the second folder is consistent with the content of the first folder at the first moment in time;

providing a global server including a third memory store having a third folder for storing third record entries in a file;

receiving changes at the first memory store;

electronically synchronizing the first folder and the third folder such that the content of the changes creates a third record entry; and

electronically synchronizing the third folder and the second folder such that a new second record entry is created in the second folder based on the third record entry.

5. A system, comprising:

a first memory store including a first folder for storing first record entries in a file;

a second memory store coupled to the first memory store, the second memory store including a second folder for storing second record entries in a file, the second folder being synchronized with the first folder at a first moment in time such that a content of the second folder is consistent with the content of the first folder at the first moment in time;

providing a global server including a third memory store having a third folder for storing third record entries in a file;

an interface for receiving changes at the first memory store;

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a general synchronization module for electronically synchronizing the first folder and the third folder such that the content of the changes creates a third record entry; and

a synchronization agent for electronically synchronizing the third folder and the second folder such that a new second record entry is created in the second folder based on the third record entry. 5

6. A system, comprising:

first memory means including a first folder for storing first record entries in a file; 10

second memory means coupled to the first memory means the second memory means including a second folder for storing second file entries in a file, the second folder being synchronized with the first folder at a first moment in time such that a content of the second folder 15

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is consistent with the content of the first folder at the first moment in time;

providing a global server including a third memory means having a third folder for storing third record entries in a file;

means for receiving changes at the first memory means;

means for electronically synchronizing the first folder and the third folder such that the content of the changes creates a third record entry; and

means for electronically synchronizing the third folder and the second folder, such that a new second record entry is created in the second folder based on the new third record entry.

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